



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

ICE arrests 29 unauthorized workers at construction company that services Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base *Operation tied to worksite enforcement effort involving sites with national security ties*

SAN DIEGO – Agents with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) today arrested 29 foreign nationals employed by Standard Drywall, a San Diego area business that also provides contract construction workers to perform services at Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base in Oceanside.

The individuals arrested during today's operation are all Mexican nationals with the exception of one Honduran national. Their immigration status makes it unlawful for them to work in the United States. They were identified after ICE agents reviewed the hiring records of more than 360 Standard Drywall employees. The workers were arrested at their homes.

Standard Drywall cooperated fully with the investigation, which is part of ICE's ongoing effort to target illegal workers with access to critical infrastructure worksites around the country, such as U.S. military installations, nuclear plants, airports, and seaports. None of the employees arrested this morning have been identified as having worked at Camp Pendleton.

According to investigators, the majority of the company's unauthorized workers used fraudulent social security and alien registration numbers to complete the required forms to obtain their jobs. While there is no evidence that any of the employees had terrorist ties, unauthorized workers with access to security sensitive sites are potentially vulnerable to exploitation by terrorists, smugglers, traffickers, or other criminals.

"Protecting the integrity of military facilities and other critical infrastructure sites is a crucial component of our interior enforcement strategy nationwide," said Julie L. Myers, Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for Immigration and Customs Enforcement. "When a person uses fraud or false documents to obtain a job, they mask not only their true identities, but also their motives and any criminal history they may have. ICE is shutting down this homeland security vulnerability with comprehensive initiatives, such as Operation Safe Cities in San Diego, to target illegal aliens employed at these sites and identify criminal activity by the employees or employers."

Today's arrests cap a four-month joint investigation involving ICE and the Naval Criminal Investigative Service in conjunction with Operation Safe Cities, a local ICE initiative implemented after 9/11 to protect sensitive businesses from possible security breaches.

Of the 29-drywall company employees arrested today 7 have criminal records including prior convictions for narcotics and firearms violations. Two of the employees are lawful permanent residents, or "green card" holders who have criminal convictions that render them deportable. All but one were arrested on immigration violations and will be administratively processed for removal.

Gerardo Espriu-Munoz, 44, had a firearm in his possession when agents arrested him at his residence. He will be criminally charged as an alien in possession of a firearm.

ICE is significantly enhancing its worksite enforcement efforts as part of its interior enforcement strategy. The Administration is seeking \$41.7 million in new funding in its fiscal year 2007 budget request. The budget increase would support the hiring of an additional 171 special agents and 35 support personnel to enhance existing worksite enforcement investigations.

The budget request also provides an additional \$135 million to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS) to expand the current Employer Verification pilot program to support a national electronic employment authorization verification system. The current basic pilot program is a voluntary electronic authorization program enabling an employer to confirm the employment eligibility of all newly hired workers. In an address to the nation last week, President Bush also called for the creation of a tamper-proof identification card for all legal foreign workers as part of a comprehensive immigration reform plan.

To date, nationwide there are more than 15,000 employer sites linked into the Basic Pilot Program. In San Diego more than 127 businesses are now using it. Interested employers are urged to call the agency's toll-free number [888-464-4218] to obtain more information about the program.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.